

Forestry-Riparian, Decision Rationale

Protection of Riparian Areas: Oregon relies on both regulatory and voluntary measures to provide riparian protections for medium and small fish bearing streams (type “F” streams) and non-fish bearing streams (type “N” streams). Generally, under the current Forest Practices Act (FPA) rules, on private forest lands, no tree harvesting is allowed within 20 feet of all fish bearing streams as well as medium and large non-fish bearing streams. Also, all snags and downed wood that don’t represent a safety or fire hazard, must be retained within riparian management areas around small and medium fish bearing streams, 50 and 70 feet, respectively. In addition, the FPA rules establish basal area targets for some riparian management areas. For example, along medium fish bearing streams, there is a minimum tree number requirement of 30 trees per 1000 feet. The state has no harvesting restrictions around small non-fish bearing streams.

The state explains that, in addition to regulatory requirements, voluntary measures for high aquatic potential streams (i.e., streams defined as having a low gradient and wide valleys where large woody debris recruitment is most likely to be effective at enhancing salmon habitat) also are adopted by the forestry industry to protect riparian areas. These voluntary measures include large wood placement, additional basal area within stream buffers, large tree retention, and treating large and medium sized non-fish streams the same as fish streams for buffer retentions.¹

However, based on the results of a number of studies including those summarized in the following paragraphs, NOAA and EPA find that the state’s existing measures for forestry riparian protection around medium and small fish bearing streams and non-fish bearing streams do not adequately protect water quality and designated uses. Therefore, per the condition the federal agencies placed on Oregon’s coastal nonpoint program, the state still needs to adopt additional management measures for forestry that provide better protection of riparian areas for small and medium fish bearing streams and non-fish bearing streams.

A significant body of science, including: 1) the Oregon Department of Forestry’s (ODF) Riparian and Stream Temperature Effectiveness Monitoring Project (RipStream)²; 2) “The Statewide Evaluation of Forest Practices Act Effectiveness in Protecting Water Quality” (i.e., the “Sufficiency Analysis”)³; and 3) the Governor’s Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team (IMST) Report on the adequacy of the Oregon forest practices in recovering salmon and trout⁴, continues to document the need for greater

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³ Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. 2002. Sufficiency Analysis: A Statewide Evaluation of Forest Practices Act Effectiveness in Protecting Water Quality, Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. October 2002.

⁴ Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team. 1999. Recovery of Wild Salmonids in Western Oregon Forests: Oregon Forest Practices Act Rules and the Measures in the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. Technical Report 1999-1 to the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, Governor’s Natural Resources Office, Salem, Oregon.

riparian protection around small and medium fish bearing streams and non-fish bearing streams in Oregon. The 2002 Sufficiency Analysis found that the FPA's riparian buffer protections for small and medium fish bearing streams may cause short-term increases in water temperature for some of these streams. As early as 1999, the IMST study found that the FPA rule requirements related to riparian buffers and large woody debris needed to be improved. Based on their scientific analysis, the team concluded that the existing regulatory approach and voluntary measures were not sufficient for the recovery of wild salmon. The IMST study recommended that non-fish bearing streams be treated no differently from fish-bearing streams and the same buffer requirements apply to both stream types. The study also recommended an increase in basal area and requirements for riparian management areas for both small and medium streams, regardless of the presence of fish. Requirements for the number of trees within the riparian management area also should be increased for both fish and non-fish bearing small and medium streams.

The 2011 RipStream reports found that FPA riparian protections on private forest lands did not ensure achievement of the Protection of Cold Water criterion (PCW) for the state water quality standard for temperature. The PCW criterion prohibits human activities, such as timber harvest, from increasing stream temperatures by more than 0.3 °C at locations critical to salmon, steelhead or bull trout. Specifically, the RipStream analysis found there was a 40 percent increase in the probability that stream temperatures would exceed the PCW criterion for small and medium fish bearing streams in the Oregon Coast Range. The study found that timber harvest conducted on state forest lands, where greater riparian protections are required, did meet PCW requirements.⁵ In addition, most private and state forest land analyzed for the study had greater no-cut buffers than required under the FPA. The RipStream analysis found that greater temperature increases occurred on private sites that had riparian no-cut buffers approaching the FPA rule requirements. The study attributed the increase in temperature was likely due to shade loss and that both riparian canopy levels and tree height determined the amount of shading provided to a stream.

Oregon has also been investing in three paired watershed studies⁶. These studies are designed to analyze the effects of timber harvesting on a watershed and reach scale. Several groups have cited the paired watershed study as evidence that the current FPA practices for riparian protection are effective at achieving water quality standards and protecting designated uses. Unpublished preliminary data from the Hinkle Creek study indicate that changes in stream temperature after timber harvesting along non-fish bearing streams were variable. In addition, there was no measureable downstream effect on temperatures.⁷ However, as Kibler (2007) notes, the variation in stream temperature and overall net observed temperature decrease may be attributable to increased slash debris along the stream after harvest, as well as a likely increase in stream flow post-harvest that could prevent an increase in

⁵ In Oregon, timber harvests on state forest land need to preserve a 25 foot no-cut buffer and an overall riparian management area of 170 feet. Limited harvest is allowed within 100 feet of the streams to achieve mature forest conditions and throughout the rest of the riparian management area, a density of 15 to 70 trees per 1000 feet must be maintained.

⁶ <http://watershedsresearch.org/watershed-studies/>

⁷ Watersheds Research Cooperative 2008. Hinkle Creek Paired Watershed Study.
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temperature and contribute to lower mean stream temperature.⁸ Therefore, there may be other factors at play that make it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about the adequacy of the FPA practices from their results. In DEQ's evaluation of the study results, staff concluded that temperature data from the Hinkle Creek and Alsea River studies show that for fish-bearing streams, temperature increases downstream from the harvest sites were very similar to the increases found in the RipStream study.⁹

NOAA and EPA note that the state is working to address some of the inadequate riparian protection measures in the FPA. The Oregon Board of Forestry (Board) has the authority to regulate forest practices through administrative rule making and could require changes to the FPA rules to protect small and medium fish bearing streams. The Board, recognizing the need to better protect small and medium fish bearing streams, directed ODF to undertake a rule analysis process that could lead to revised riparian protection rules. At its September 2014 meeting, the Board voted unanimously in favor of continuing to analyze what changes might be needed in the Oregon Forest Practice Rules to provide greater buffer protections for medium and small fish bearing streams on private forest lands. Studies have shown that when applying FPA buffers to these waters, temperatures will increase above the State's "Protecting Cold Water" criterion 40% of the time. NOAA and EPA encourage the state to move forward with this rule making process expeditiously. Until FPA rule changes are adopted, the federal agencies cannot consider them as part of the state's coastal nonpoint program.

However, even if the Board does adopt enhanced protections for small and medium fish bearing streams that are designed to meet water quality standards, the federal agencies remain concerned that the Board and ODF are not considering increased protections for riparian areas around non-fish bearing streams. As previously discussed in the IMST study, non-fish bearing streams should be treated no differently from fish-bearing streams; the same buffer requirements should apply to both stream types.

⁸ Kibler, K.M. 2007. The Influence of Contemporary Forest Harvesting on Summer Stream Temperatures in Headwater Streams of Hinkle Creek, Oregon. Thesis for the degree of Master of Science in Forest Engineering presented on June 28, 2007. Oregon State University. http://watershedsresearch.org/assets/reports/WRC_Kibler,Kelly_2007_Thesis.pdf

⁹ Seeds, J., Mitchie, R., Foster, E., ODEQ, Jepsen, D. 2014. "Responses to Questions/Concerns Raised by Oregon Forestry Industries Council Regarding the Protecting Cold Water Criterion of Oregon's Temperature Water Quality Standard", Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Memo. 06/19/2014

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temperatures and contribute to lower mean stream temperatures.⁸ Therefore, there may be other factors at play that make it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about the adequacy of the FPA practices from their results. In DEQ's evaluation of the study results, staff concluded that temperature data from the Hinkle Creek and Alsea River studies show that for fish-bearing streams, temperature increases downstream from the harvest sites were very similar to the increases found in the RipStream study.⁹

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NOAA and EPA also encourage the state to consider increased protections for riparian areas around non-fish bearing streams. Small non-fish bearing streams constitute 60% to 70% of the stream network in watersheds and additional protections are needed as well. As previously discussed in the IMST study, non-fish bearing streams should be treated no differently from fish-bearing streams; the same buffer requirements should apply to both stream types.

⁸ Kibler, K.M. 2007. The Influence of Contemporary Forest Harvesting on Summer Stream Temperatures in Headwater Streams of Hinkle Creek, Oregon. Thesis for the degree of Master of Science in Forest Engineering presented on June 28, 2007. Oregon State University. http://watershedsresearch.org/assets/reports/WRC_Kibler,Kelly_2007_Thesis.pdf

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